

TIPS FOR RETAINING RELATIONSHIPS WITH EDITORS

THE WRITER

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PUBLISH

Our
Markets
guide to
publishing

Create
narrative
poems like
Mary Jo Bang

Build texture
in poems
with film
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A PRIMER ON
DEEPENING YOUR
WORK IN VERSE

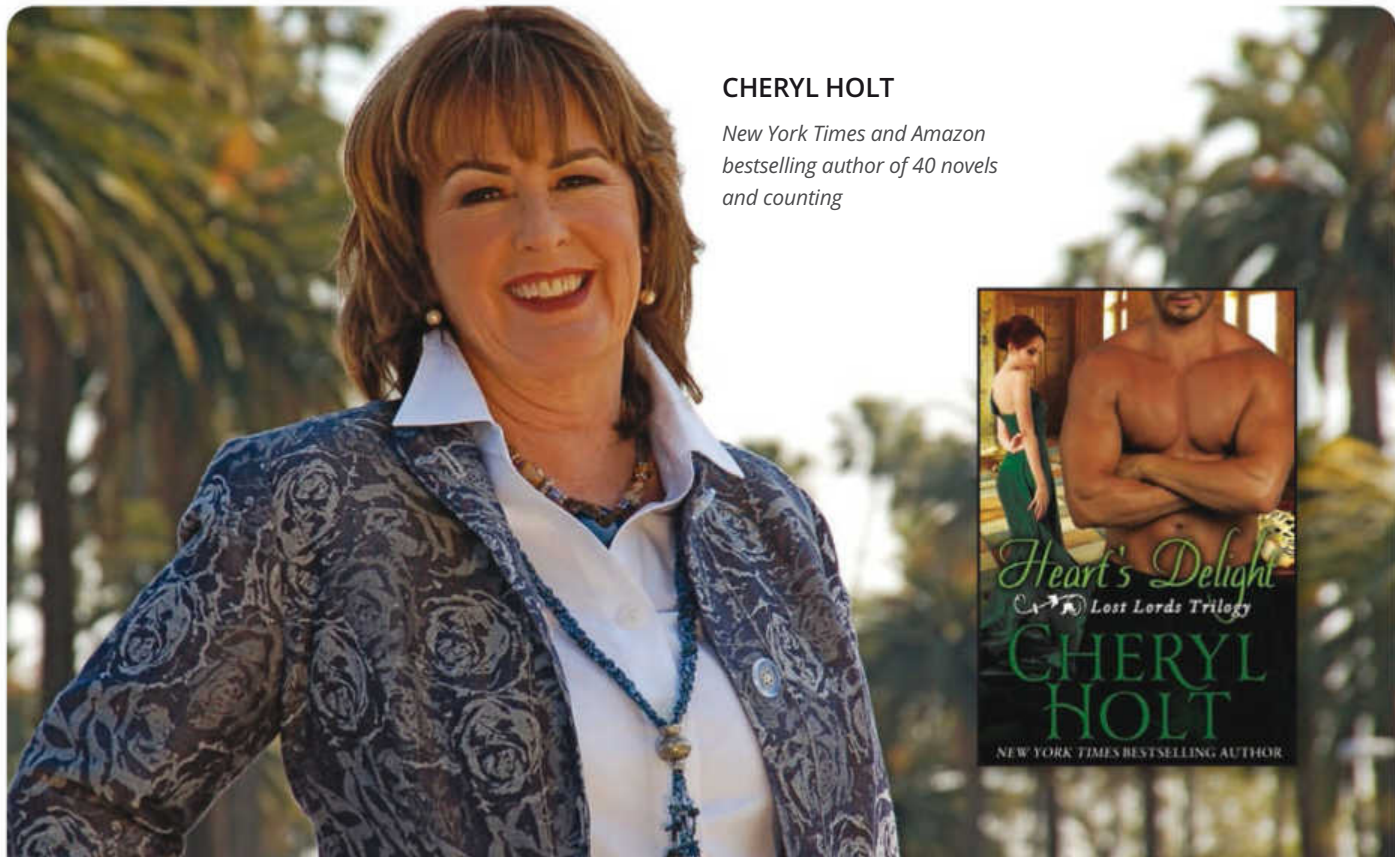


Abayomi Animashaun

Parneshia Jones

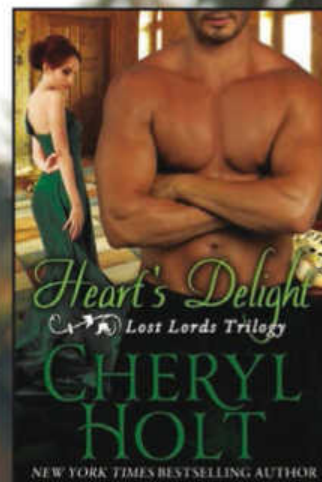
Winnie Holzman

Joseph Bathanti



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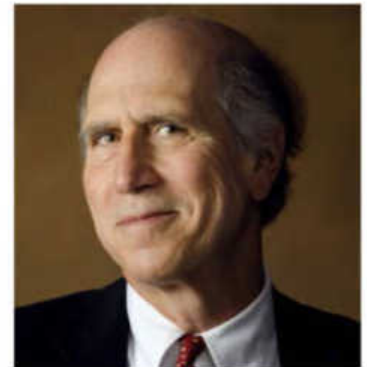
Don Share, Baroque in Hackney, small press editors and more.

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Joseph Bathanti: "I'm decidedly a narrative poet, although I don't let that get in the way if I want to step outside those lines and fool around with other kinds of deliveries."



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Shortly after I returned from Ireland a few years ago, I encountered Seamus Heaney's poem "Postscript." The landscape he describes – "out west" – in County Clare had captivated me with its craggy rocks and rolling hills. It was (and still is) resonant in my imagination. Heaney's poem caused a major take-me-back moment (in spirit of Irish crooner Van Morrison).



Shutterstock/Juanan Barros Moreno

Just as Heaney brings the location to life, he quickly and disconcertingly tosses forward this important line:

Useless to think you'll park or capture it
More thoroughly.

And that's where the poetry's magic goes wild. First, he *has* captured the "foam and glitter" with language. And then he disabuses the reader of the accuracy of that description. Then he goes existential:

You are neither here nor there.

What happens to the reader in "Postscript" is nothing short of miraculous. Heaney's truth about physical observations and about ephemeral experience is so neatly and rhythmically packaged that it contains multitudes.

I recommend making the time to read this small poem.

In the meantime, you can learn so much about crafting poetry through the lens of top-notch poets featured in this issue of *The Writer*. April is National Poetry Month, after all, and we want to provide you with provocative insights and tips from some of the most compelling poets we could find.

Remarkably, Winnie Holzman, creator of the hit, if brief, TV series *My So-Called Life*, came to her work through poetry, and you can find out how in our interview. Even if you aren't into poetry, the advice you will find in these pages is broadly applicable to whatever writing you practice. We believe you will enjoy and find instruction in the material we have gathered for you.

After all, you never know when a story or a poem is going to "catch the heart off guard and blow it open." That's Heaney again. Drop everything and go read his poem.

Alicia Anstead

Alicia Anstead
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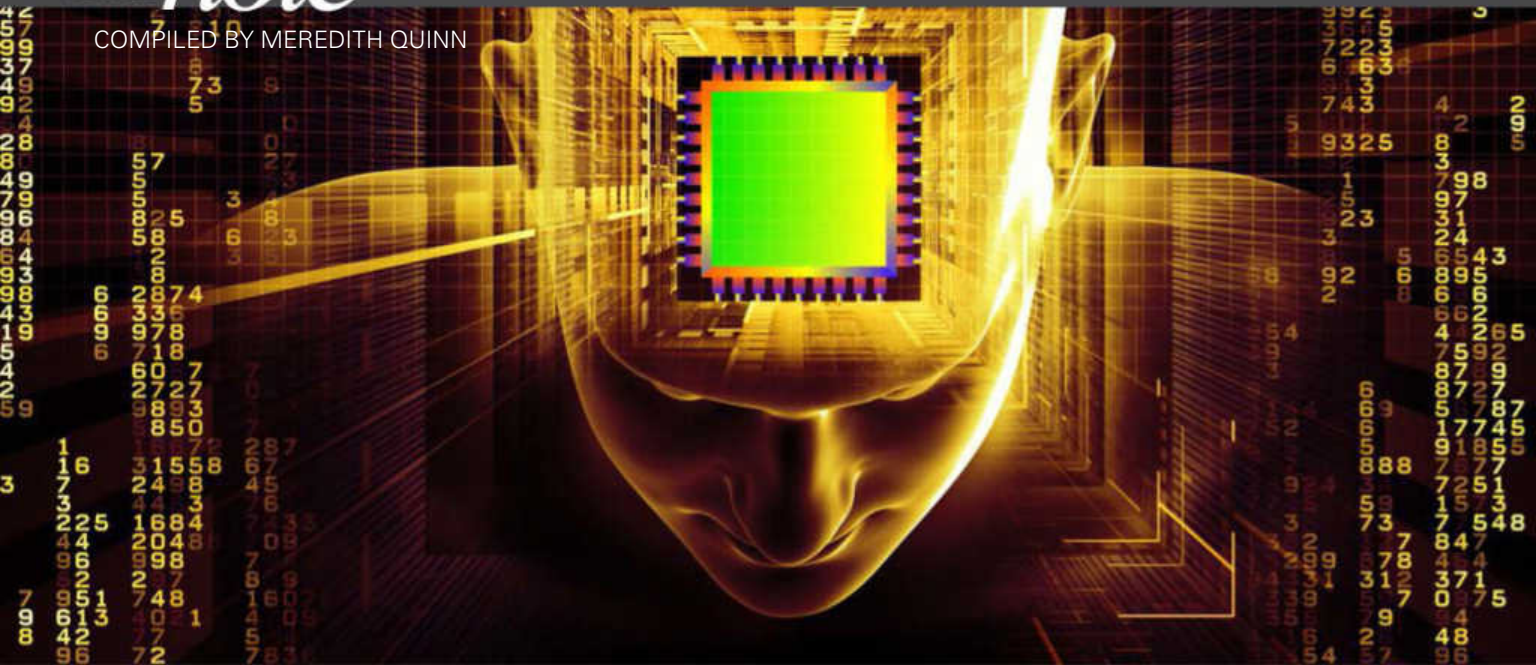
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Uncertain in the wild frontier

A poet reconsiders his earliest approach to craft.

BY ABAYOMI ANIMASHAUN

After almost 20 years of writing poetry, I find it's becoming ever more difficult to find the necessary language that appropriately encapsulates my notions of its *what* and its *how*. By this, I mean what poetry is supposed to be about and how I'm supposed to approach it.

Gone are the certainties of my MFA years, when I got into rows with teachers who tried in vain to help me understand that there are infinite entry points to the poetic landscape and that the more approaches I come to understand, the more planes of metaphor I might have at my disposal to give shape to the vibrations of my own imagination. But in my bull-headedness, I was convinced that the only poetry worthwhile had to be accessible and representational.

Back then, poems were self-contained constructs with palpable terminal points, and they often had little to do with each other. Each poem had a reason and a lengthy treatise rehearsed and defended at the slight drop of a hat. I was always working on poems ABC for reasons XYZ. Moreover, I preferred to hear myself talk about the ideas than to actu-

ally be in my study quietly writing the poems.

And when one *big* poem was done, I would return to my "Book of Certainties," pull out another big subject and set about justifying it and finding words for it. On the surface, I was pronounced and sure. But when I was by myself, outside the lights of performing for friends, I had this nagging idea that my poems, the beginnings, middles and endings of which I knew (and could articulate) before even writing them, were overly determined and, to be honest, boring.

Besides, I came to find the notion of arguing each reader into accepting the validity of my work a tiring proposition. How long was I to do this? And to how many people? How could I be sure that what I was writing was precisely what each person needed? I grew weary of my own bombast. And while there are many poets in whose hands certainty of how each poem should be *and* what each poem should be about (before they start writing said poem) is a worthwhile tool, I've come to realize it is not for me.

The more I've read and pushed further into the poetic landscape, the lower I have brought those standards – with

their loud and colorful positions – with which I adorned myself when I first started. Now, I willingly reach for the same books I denied and find myself teaching poets I railed against to my own students, who, in a few cases, have reacted with the same sure vehemence as I once did. And my pleas of “don’t be like I was” have, in a case or two, fallen on deaf ears.

Since certainty (with a big “c”) is no longer a compass I use in navigating that wild and engaging frontier of poem making, I find myself more open to possibilities. I’m eager to re-learn and re-see. And I’ve come to have a particular faith in the creative impulse that sometimes leaves me awake at night and has me reading authors with whom I’m enamored without guilt and others I might have rejected based on borrowed poetics. Most times, I don’t even know where I’m going before I begin writing. In the best way possible, this approach leaves me riven. It’s a beautiful thing to feel the *knowing* with which my old poetry was informed brought into near stillness and, essentially, silenced.

This way, I am better able to feel each hue and undulation of my imagination come together and take on words, phrases and paragraphs that fill pages and, in time, take on tone, affect emotion and arouse mood. At its best, this approach has allowed me to grow in ways I couldn’t have

conceived almost 20 years ago. Poems are no longer clearly defined constructs with precise terminal points for me. Instead, they’ve become, if I may, a long conversation, an expansive dialogic, that stretches from my contemporaries all the way back to Adam and Eve.

Now when I sit down to write, it’s not with set homilies and locked brows, but with a childlike wonder that allows me to see beyond myself and the little I think I know. I wish I could explain it. I wish I could provide some neat language for it. But something inside of me becomes more generous and humane when I approach poetry this way. When I’m done, I find myself with a surprised understanding of whatever subject I gently engage. Within this understanding, I experience a renewal of sorts that often lifts me beyond the drudgery of the everyday.

Abayomi Animashaun, who was born in Nigeria, has an MFA from the International Writing Program at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas and a Ph.D. from the University of Kansas. His poems have appeared in *Diode*, *The Cortland Review*, *African American Review*, *Passages North* and *The Adirondack Review*. He is the author of two poetry collections and the editor of an anthology of essays, *Others Will Enter the Gates: Immigrant Poets on Poetry, Influences, and Writing in America*. He teaches writing and literature at the University of Wisconsin, Oshkosh.

WRITERS ON WRITING

Don Share

Don Share is the editor of *Poetry*, one of the world’s most influential poetry journals. He has previously served as editor of *Literary Imagination*, poetry editor of *Harvard Review* and poetry editor of *Partisan Review*. He has published several books, including the poetry collections *Wishbone*, three poems from which were nominated for Pushcart Prizes, and *Union*, a finalist for the Boston Globe/PEN New England Winship Award. In addition to writing and editing poetry, Share translates it, and his translated collection of works by the Spanish poet Miguel Hernández received the Premio Valle Inclán Prize for Translation and the Times Literary Supplement Translation Prize. His next book is a critical edition of the poems of Basil Bunting.

WHAT IS THE MOST IMPORTANT LESSON YOU’VE LEARNED ABOUT WRITING?

Capaciousness. Sorry to use such an awkward word. I’ve learned not to steer by the lights merely of my own tastes, preferences, desires and predilections. Things I have the strongest resistance to teach me the most, in writing as in life.

HOW HAS THIS HELPED YOU AS A WRITER?

Well, for one thing, it has helped

me avoid becoming too comfortable with my own preoccupations, which, let’s face it, would be of interest to very few people. We all know that Whitman said that he contains multitudes, and we pay lip service to that, but if you think hard about what it really entails, you’ll work harder to become expansive and adventurous.

—Gabriel Packard is the associate director of the creative writing MFA program at Hunter College in New York City.



WHERE IN THE WORLD IS THE WRITER?

► Susan Ewing finds inspiration at the abbey ruins at St. Dogmaels, a small village in west Wales.



► James Neureuther took a Mediterranean cruise and enjoyed a breathtaking view of Florence, Italy.

WHERE
DO YOU READ
THE WRITER?

Send a photo of yourself
and a short description
of the location to
tweditorial@madavor.com.

TWITTER-VERSE

Prose writers might have trouble fitting their message into 140 characters, but for many poets, it's the perfect forum. Here are some recent MTs of poetry gone viral.



maya
@8thrhythm
on silence
between notes
colors of why
#haiku



acbetekhtin
@acbetekhtin
this year will leave without
tears, as it always has/a lover
without remorse
#poetry



Jumesto
@TerzaVerse
What's not written
in the lines
is the blur I see in;
too close to focus,
too far away to clarify.
#micropoetry



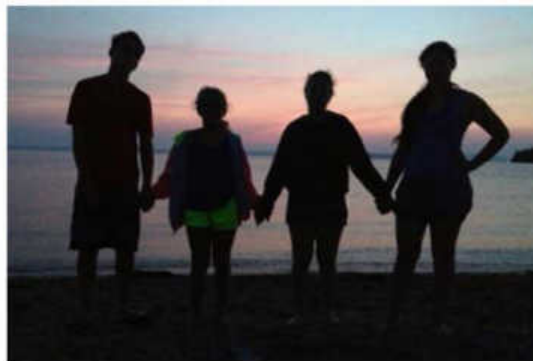
Alexandra Meehan
@LexMeehan
As I listen
In my forest
The animals
My closet
Chopin
A circus
Black porpoise
Spurting
Darkness
#micropoetry #poem



Christopher Pollard
@iconoduly
winter night
wearing a dead man's
coat
#haiku #poem #poet
#winter #dead #coat
#Oklahoma

Writing Prompt

THE SECRET POEM Each year for more than a decade, these four people have been meeting on a beach. They share a secret, something that happened to them together as kids. Each year, that secret draws them back to the same spot. One year, the chain is broken. What happens? Does one of them



go missing? Does one of them break the trust? It's your poem. Find distilled and nuanced language to create a verse that narrates the emotion, suspense and plot of the poem.

Notes from the blogosphere

NAME

Katy Evans-Bush

YEARS BLOGGING

10

GENRE

Poetry, poetics,
politics

WEBSITE

baroqueinhackney.com

You say that Jane Holland told you to start a blog.**What was her reasoning?**

Jane's a friend of mine and an unstoppable workaholic. We were talking one day, about two years before my first collection came out.

The subject of blogs came up, and she said, "Are you seriously trying to tell me you want to get published, and you don't have a blog?" Back then, blogs were common enough, but they weren't as mainstream as they are now. I just thought, yeah, she has a good point, and took my laptop to a café and started my blog. It all happened almost without me thinking about it.

Your blog has undergone many incarnations. What has that process been like? Have you finally found your footing?

I'm not sure it's quite as much a case of "finding my footing" as it is simply allowing the blog to grow and evolve along with my

writing career. The blog was conceived as a means of growing that career, and it has done very well. At the time – in 2006 – there wasn't another blog out there doing what I wanted to do. The general shape of it was very clear in my mind: not a blog about writing poems, and certainly not a blog of my poems. In fact it was to be a blog about poetry in general as well as all the other kinds of things I – and other poets, presumably – am interested in. I allowed myself tons of room to experiment and see what felt best and worked best.

How do you strike a balance between subject matters?

This is an interesting question. I had a sort of unwritten list of "the kinds of posts I write," and back when I was blogging every day, I would try to make sure I wasn't doing too many of just one kind. They roughly included: little

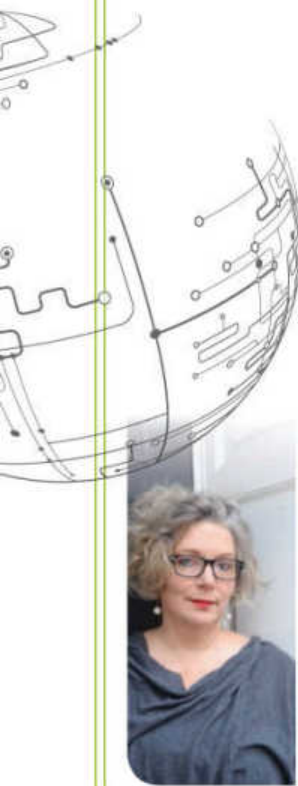
squibs (a picture I'd seen, a comment on a news item), stories about the kids, items about London, items about history, items about music, fashion, art, poetry news, reviews of poetry, readings of poems, satirical pieces about writers I didn't like (or did) and all sorts, really. I tried to vary the tone, mood and size of the posts. I would sometimes do a weekly series, like one I ran about people who had poem tattoos. I guess I ran it editorially – which isn't surprising, for a writer and editor, now that I think about it.

How did you know it was time to expand your site from just a blog to a place to showcase your poetry, workshops you lead, etc.?

Baroque in Hackney started off, as I'd advise anyone to start, on a free blogging platform. In the event, I chose Blogger – back when it was Blogspot – purely because a friend had used it. A year or so

in, I moved it to WordPress because I liked the platform better; at that time, it had more flexibility. And a few years after that, when I was freelance and running workshops, and had a couple of books out and lots of stuff online, I felt it would be better to have a website attached to the blog and to own it myself. So I now have a hosted WordPress website with a blog page, which is also the landing page. It's hosted by some friends of my oldest kid, the sort of boys who bought shares in a server when they were 18.

One thing people often ask is: When do you start calling yourself a "poet?" My best answer is: When it starts to be the easiest way of answering people when they ask what you do. Same thing with the blogging platform. Each development of the blog happened at the point when that became the easiest way of making it do what I needed it to do.



Writing Prompt

CH-CH-CHANGES

People change. Your perceptions of them change. You change. Write a scene that illustrates a relationship between two characters. Then, without bias, change that relationship. Focus on the moment of transformation, when one character experiences an illumination about another character – or about himself or herself in relationship to the other. How can you reveal the process of change? What key details create the moment as believable and relatable? Work to shine a light on the nuances of the emotions and behaviors that unleash new paths for the characters.



Shutterstock/Ilona Remy

ASK THE WRITER

I am writing a nonfiction book about a trial recently in the news. I have done thorough research and know the characters well. I want to share the feelings, thoughts and motivations of my characters based on that research. I am getting some resistance from fiction writers, who admonish me to be transparent in what they call speculation. My thinking is that the research informs my writing, and the reader will understand my sources by the time they have read the entire book. Am I wrong about this?

A work of nonfiction that dramatizes events, as it seems your book does, often takes liberties. Conversations, for example, may not be recalled exactly, but are crafted in a way that stays true to the spirit of the exchange. Still, such a book has an obligation to fact and a responsibility to be clear about where the facts end and the author's contribution takes over.

Maria Flook's *Invisible Eden: A Story of Love and Murder on Cape Cod* is a work of nonfiction that tells the true story of the murder of Christa Worthington. Flook inserts herself into the narrative as a character as she interviews and investigates. Although Flook never met Worthington, she contemplates her life and imagines her way into Worthington's sensory experience and some of her private moments. The book conveys fact and goes deeper into the possibilities surrounding what remains unknown through the use of imagination, conclusion and speculation — and the distinctions are clear. The reader is an informed party; the narrative details Flook's sources

as she encounters them, processes what she learns and plans her next moves.

Sometimes there's a conflict between the demands of dramatization and the available facts. Dave Eggers ran into this with *What Is the What?*, a novel based on the life of Sudanese "Lost Boy" Valentino Achak Deng. In an interview on NPR's *All Things Considered*, Eggers said he and Deng "set out to write a purely nonfictional book but it was really restricting." Deng was young when the events took place, and that left significant gaps that Eggers needed to fill with additional personal accounts, research and his own imagination. In a preface to the novel, Deng describes the lengthy collaboration and weighs in on the result: "The book is historically accurate, and the world I have known is not different from the one depicted within these pages."

In sharing a real person's thoughts, feelings and motivations, the author must first *know* them. And the only way to truly know them is to have some sort of access to that person's inner world. This might happen in honest, candid interviews or perhaps from entries in a detailed personal journal. This was not true for Flook — she did not know Christa Worthington — so she generally made imagined moments and speculation clear. Eggers did have access, based on close collaboration with Deng, the subject of the book, yet there was still enough invention to warrant the label of fiction. As you consider your own work, take into account how much of your analysis and interpretation you are bringing to it. Are you making subjective conclusions based on evidence such as facial expressions, comments under oath and actions? Or have you learned, directly from the source, about that person's inner experience? There's a difference. It's important to clarify for the reader what kind of information he or she is getting.

—Brandi Reissenweber teaches fiction writing and reading fiction at Gotham Writers Workshop.

NEW VOICES

TRYING TO BREAK INTO THE WRITING WORLD? THINK SMALL. WE ASKED DECISION-MAKERS AT THREE SMALL PRESSES TO REVEAL SECRETS TO FINDING A NEW WRITER.

● "Honesty catches my eye. Not necessarily saying raw things for raw purposes, but actually believing this writer has an experience outside of the piece of work at all."

—Dan Nowak, Editor, Imaginary Friend Press

● "We often publish new writers, yet the primary criterion remains the same: Connect with the readers."

—Larry Smith, Director, Bottom Dog Press

● "I look for poetry or fiction that walks that fine line between being too derivative and too outlandish. I love quirky, but I do want to be able to understand what I'm reading (though not necessarily on the first read-through). I hate to admit it, but I am also attracted to clean writing without many grammatical problems."

—Jack Estes, Publisher, Pleasure Boat Studio

Out to dry

Water covers about 71 percent of the earth's surface. The human body is made up of about 60 percent water. With droughts and melting glaciers a mainstay in headlines, water, water is everywhere. And with April showers come May flowers. Don't let your writing get soggy this spring. Keep dry with these impermeable products.



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with an inchoate impulse, a perception of what the creation might look like, rather than a final product. A good mentor can encourage and direct this impulse, helping the emerging writer shape thoughts and words into something resonant and beautiful." – Tony Eprile, author of *The Persistence of Memory* (2004)

networks, but as evidence it's possible to live as a writer. That's how mentorship becomes an investment of hope and confidence that yes, you can do this, it's possible, even when you're sure it's not." – Pamela Petro, author of *Sitting up with the Dead: A Storied Journey through the American South* (2012)

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Accidental progress

Life doesn't get in the way of a father's poetry practice.

I've been a poet since I turned 17 and fell into the habit of scribbling angst-ridden verses in a journal.

Even after I'd gone to graduate school to study creative writing, I wrote confessionally about my childhood in a working-class Italian American family in Buffalo, New York. As the only male, I was expected to carry on the family name. Such a birthright

came with many rewards, but expectations, too, which I also wrote about.

In these first poems, I tried to be honest and leave nothing out. I wrote about my grandfather buying me a rifle and taking me hunting when I was 6. Other poems focused on teenage years, playing trombone – not very well – in the high school band and wearing the fanciest outfit I owned: a tan corduroy

suit and chocolate-brown clogs. These poems, trapped in my own limited perspective, said in a solemn tone: *These Things Happened to Me, Therefore They Are Very Deep*. Writing such odes to the past felt important psychologically, and I found some success, publishing in literary journals and winning a few modest awards.

This kind of writing went on for many years. Then, a few months after I turned 32, my wife and I had a baby. When I held our daughter in my arms the first time, my world shifted. My perspective altered. I was no longer the shy, sensitive poet-boy. I no longer saw the world as the *Story of Me*. Writing those kinds of poems became terribly boring. The feeling was unnerving. I'd walked around the house with the baby nestled in one arm, gently rocking back and forth, wondering: *What the hell am I going to write about now?*

For a while, I didn't write at all.

I trusted that the desire would eventually return. Poetry still compelled me, although I didn't have the time or mental energy to write. Then one day, a friend emailed me some haiku she had written, and it clicked. I could write haiku. About the kids. How hard could 17 syllables be?

The form lent a simplicity and peacefulness to my writing process. Over the course of two years, I wrote approximately 100 haiku with titles such as “*Our Daughter Is Way Sick*,” “*Fatherhood: An Exercise in Fatigue*” and “*Debt Haiku: A Series*.”

Not a lot of words, but it ain't nothing, as my grandfather used to say.



Still, when I thought of my poetic identity, I grew anxious. Perhaps I wasn't a true writer. Perhaps my entire artistic impulse had been borne of a need to make sense of my youth; maybe it had just been therapy. And now the desire to know the self, to uncover its many mysteries, had been usurped by something greater. What that was, I didn't know.

As life settled into a routine, the haiku gradually expanded into longer poems. When we had our second daughter, the pace picked up. In every free moment, I wrote until I had almost 50 poems, enough for a book. They were rough, but I began revising. I considered not only craft but also what the poems said. I remembered: This is what poets do. You write poems and let them sit a while, and when you

go back to revise, you find connections, images that call to one another, themes that coalesce.

Again, I had written about my experience, but with a twist. Instead of "this is what happened to me," it was more like, "this is what's happening to us." That's a subtle semantic distinction, but it's profound, a move from solipsist to witness. There's a sense of consequence not related to the self, but to others.

After many rounds of revision, I ended up with *Active Gods*, 37 poems broken into three sections. Poems about industrial and human decline, intermingled with the markers of everyday home life: Barbie Doll play-scapes, living room dance parties, swimming at the public pool and walking the dog with a pacemaker in her sweet and gentle heart.

I didn't know anything about fatherhood or middle age, but I wrote poems about them anyway. And as I revised, I considered a possible twist to that old writer's rule, to write what you know. Instead, I landed on: Write what you're learning.

I suppose if there's another writerly lesson to be found here, it's this: Always write. Even if it's a paragraph or a haiku or a fragment. You're a writer, no matter how overwhelming life is or if your favorite subject matter feels like it has exhausted itself. Every day you wake up, you're a new person. You're always learning who that person is. ■

Michael Henry is the executive director of Lighthouse Writers Workshop and author of three books of poetry. He lives in Denver with his wife and two daughters.

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Promises, promises

Establish theme early and stick with it.

As a creative writing instructor, I often teach “tools over rules” to free students from what they “can” and “can’t” do in writing. Early on, I introduce “story promise,” or the point, usually in the first paragraph or page, when the writer gives the reader a promised direction or assertion of the story’s subject. If the story begins with a woman in a boat setting sail, as the reader, I assume this is where it’s going. Often, though, new writers begin in one place, and as they figure the story out, they take it somewhere else – the woman in the boat story might quickly become one about a seagull flying to shore.

To get students started, I ask them to tell me what the story they’re writing is about in one sentence. If they begin a long discourse, I ask them to try again. Of course, we don’t always know what the story will reveal, but often we have an idea of where we might like it to go, and that should be shared with the reader. Here are some questions I ask.

Why does the story start on this day, at this very moment?

Consider why you’ve chosen this scene to begin out of all the other scenes in the character’s life. I often hear writers say, “It came to me like a movie; the character was walking down the street, and I followed.” Since we are the biographers of our characters, we have a say in where the story goes. Often, the movie that takes shape in our minds includes an introduction in which no one is talking

and simply is preparing for what’s to come. If your character is in preparation mode, begin at the moment of importance, or when the first plot point occurs. If, for example, your character is getting ready for an important interview, you could easily skip to the actual interview.

Are your characters meandering?

Watch out for these common obstacles to good story chops.

1 HAPPILY-EVER-AFTER ALL THE TIME. If you’re keeping your characters safe, happy, in love, at the top of their game and living wonderful lives, there probably isn’t enough conflict. Refocus so that your story doesn’t grow stale.

2 RUNAWAY DIALOGUE. Look for places that the dialogue goes on a beat too long. Know when to end a conversation. Leave off greetings, introductions and goodbyes. Keep the discussion on-point and working toward driving the promise of the story.

3 BECOME A REVISION SHARK. Find areas to revise and shorten scenes. Ask what doesn’t belong or what can be omitted to strengthen the story. What are the essential details? Sometimes while drafting a story, we think our readers won’t get something. That’s often because we don’t know what’s going to happen next either. Once you do, trust that less is needed to convey the guts of the scene.

Ask yourself: Are you starting as close to the action as possible? Can the story be moved up or pushed back a day, a week or an hour? What is the integral point of the scene that you want to get across? When you focus on these questions, you’re shaping the story promise and direction your character will go.

What is the central conflict of the story?

The central conflict is what propels your characters and the story. In a novel, each chapter should have mini-conflicts that work toward the whole.

Ask yourself: What’s the worst that can happen to my character on this day, at this moment? The more conflict, the more the story moves forward, the more a reader wants to know what happens next. I often see my students get a good idea and then stall on writing it. Why wait? Sometimes we’re afraid to give up a golden plot point, but if we trust our instincts, another plot twist will soon turn up.

Where does your story meander?

My students have reported getting to the end of a manuscript only to say, with a bit of regret, “It’s not the story I intended to write.” When characters get carried away talking or walking off-script, they meander away from the guide of the story promise. Once your characters veer too far afield, it might be time to stop and reevaluate. Writers sometimes make new discoveries when they meander, and that’s great, but then consider reworking the opening to reflect this new story promise.

An exercise

Go to the library and pull 10 books off the shelf. Read the first page or first chapter and identify the point at which you know what the story is about and where it will go. That will help you understand the story promise in your own work.

An example of an opening with a strong story promise is J. R. R. Tolkien's classic book *The Hobbit*, which begins:

In a hole in the ground there lived a hobbit. Not a nasty, dirty, wet hole, filled with the ends of worms and an oozy smell, nor yet a dry, bare, sandy hole with nothing in it to sit down on or to eat: it was a hobbit-hole, and that means comfort.

Alice Seabold's *The Almost Moon* starts with her narrator's assertion:

When all was said and done, killing my mother was easy.

In both cases, we get an idea of where the story might go. Although we might not know what a hobbit is, we know Tolkien's book will be about one. With Seabold's opening, we know we will find out why the narrator killed the mother.

Do your best to recognize what can be cut and revised from your story openings, and what can be kept, expanded or made clearer. In the end, the story promise is just one more tool – not a rule – to help the creative process. **W**

Hunter Liguore teaches creative writing at Western Connecticut State University and historic fiction writing at Lesley University. She also teaches nature writing at the Mark Twain House and Connecticut Audubon Society.



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Bounce this

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Establishing a social media presence is a critical component in an overall marketing plan. Stirring an engaging conversation can result in significant social media traffic and help writers stand out from the nearly 2.5 million pieces of content shared per minute on Facebook alone. When followers engage with posts, content and name are exposed to a larger audience, growing an author's platform.

"Consistently engaging your followers is critical to getting any kind of bounce in social media," says marketing expert Penny Sansevieri, "[but] bombarding your newsfeed with promotional type posts works up to a point."

Build an audience and engage your followers (without being a nuisance) using these eight strategies.

1 Be authentic with the right platform. "There was a time when you needed to be on all platforms," says Sansevieri. "Not anymore. Quality over quantity." Whether Pinterest, LinkedIn, Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, Twitter or whatever other social media platform that emerges between writing this article and publication, choose one your demographic of readers uses. Offer a meaningful experience for followers by communicating in a unique voice that illustrates your opinions and mission, while showing that you are accessible and willing to engage. And remember to share other's posts in addition to promoting your own.

2 Create a series of helpful and informative posts. Think of struggles your target audience might face, and offer advice based on experience. For example, if you've gone through the

hurdles of publishing a book, share marketing or writing strategies. If you come across an article that you find interesting, share it with your followers, who might also find it helpful. C. Hope Clark, author of the Edisto Island mystery series, says, "I try to show I care about readers, instead of wanting their money. I'm always looking for something that adds interest to my readers and the writer's life."

3 Choose visuals that compliment your text. Images and videos are paramount in engaging an audience. According to the content marketing company Visually, posts with images get 94 percent more views on average than those without an image. However, the wrong visuals or irrelevant text draw attention away from the valuable content and links you want followers to pay attention to.

4 Share images of live events. When her novel *Murder under the Bridge: A Palestine Mystery* launched, Kate Jessica Raphael shared photos of speaking events that included other writers, whom she tagged in the captions. "The friends of your friends share them on Facebook, and it does not even look like you are promoting yourself," she says. Be sure to

A social media primer

Platform	What it does	Users in 2015	Largest age group	Men	Women	Education
Facebook	A way to stay connected with others and share news	1.55 billion (Sept.)	18-29	66%	77%	72% of all college grads
Instagram	Photo sharing and updates	400 million (Sept.)	18-29	24%	31%	32% with some college experience
Twitter	Updates, images, links in 140 characters or less	320 million (Sept.)	18-29	25%	21%	27% of all college grads
Pinterest	Virtual bookmarking and discovery	100 million (Sept.)	18-29	16%	44%	37% with some college experience
LinkedIn	Professional networking and sharing of business-related articles	400 million (Nov.)	30-49	26%	25%	46% of all college grads
Snapchat	Photos and videos that expire within 24 hours	100 million (Nov.)	13-34	31% (teens)	51% (teens)	n/a

Sources: Platform websites, *New York Times* and Pew Research Center

tag other people, locations and event pages to widen the reach of a single post.


5 Join a hashtag conversation. Promote a hashtag to start a conversation and let people know how they can participate. “Engagement starts when you join an ongoing discussion via a hashtag on Twitter instead of just pushing out content,” Sansevieri says.

6 Post topics that move you. If you are enthusiastic about a particular topic, chances are your followers will be as well. “By taking a stand on something controversial and being passionate, other readers will want to show you they connect to your ideals and like your page,” says Sande Bortiz Berger, author of *The Sweetness*, a finalist in historical fiction for the USA Best Book Awards. Include a link to your website or author Facebook page to increase engagement. Tag friends to spread word about your post.

7 Share to win. To build book buzz, Sansevieri suggests holding a contest that encourages your readers to post about your book. The most creative share wins. Her clients invited their followers to share images of their favorite places to read on a Pinterest board, which were then repinned

across social media channels. Ask your followers a similar question, perhaps tying it in to the theme of your work.

8 Connect with niche groups. Both Facebook and LinkedIn feature special interest groups, which members can join to be part of a community based around a particular theme. If your post is timely and relevant to a given group, you may be able to stir conversation and get additional likes since members are scouting for informational posts on your topic. Before posting, take note of what is typically shared in the group. Sansevieri recommends avoiding the “post and ditch” syndrome. “If people are responding to something you’ve shared, respond with a like or a thank you,” she says. “Don’t just vanish. This will compel your followers to share more, because they sense you cared enough to respond.”

Even in a fast-paced digital age, it takes time and energy to sustain engagement with your followers, but doing so will earn you credibility and trust. Your followers can always buy your book, but at the end of the day, they want to be engaged and inspired. 

Dorit Sasson has written for The Huffington Post, Media Bistro and The Write Life. She is the author of several nonfiction books and the memoir *Accidental Soldier: A Memoir of Service and Sacrifice in the Israel Defense Forces*.

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BY
BERNADETTE
GEYER

In the

(cross)

cut

USING A
FILM TECHNIQUE,
YOU CAN CRAFT
POETRY WITH RICH
TENSIONS AND METAPHORS.

I FIRST ENCOUNTERED cross-cutting as a creative technique in a film studies class in college, in which we were instructed to pay close attention to the climactic montage in *The Godfather* that “cross-cut” between the baptism of Michael Corleone’s nephew and the murders of his enemies. As a stylistic device, the cross-cut (also known as parallel editing) is well suited to establishing tension in a film.

The second time I thought about this creative technique was when I read Jack Myers’ exercise “The Cut-and-Shuffle Poem” from *The Practice of Poetry: Writing Exercises from Poets Who Teach*, edited by Robin Behn and Chase Twichell. In Myers’ exercise, he suggests writing out “two completely unrelated and emotionally opposite six- to ten-line dramatic situations” and then, “as one might shuffle the playing cards in a deck, alternate the first line or two from scene 1 with the first line or two from scene 2, then the second line or so from scene 1 with the second line or so from scene 2,” and so on, as if you were shuffling a deck of cards.

Just as readers create linkages between the most fantastic similes, our minds similarly strive to see the connections between situations in a cross-cutting poem.

Poets can use this technique in various ways. Some methods result in larger portions of content moving back and forth at a slow pace, while others employ a faster pace of alternating snippets. Sometimes, mere slivers of a separate situation are inserted into a longer narrative. Here’s more about how it works.

THE VOLLEY CROSS-CUT

As when you’re watching volleyball or tennis, the rate at which the poem moves back and forth between situations or viewpoints serves to increase or decrease tension. For example, in Yvette Neisser Moreno’s poem “Midnight, Waiting for the Last Train,” narration of a tense primary situation is interrupted by cut-away references to an emotionally opposite concurrent situation. Here’s the poem.

Before you can look away, he curls his lips
and locks your gaze to begin his story:

*One time, I pulled out a gun
and nailed a girl on the train.*

You keep your hands in your pockets,
your eyes on the black tunnel,
the escalator grumbling down step by step.

Two drunk kids descend to the platform,
shrill voices resonating on bare tracks,
filling the vast silence of the vaulted ceiling.

*Have you ever been so scared
you couldn’t say a word without stuttering?*

A girl cartwheels along the tiled floor.
When the train’s headlights flash into the station,
you thank God for the slight breeze, the ding
of doors sliding open, blinking red lights.

In this poem, in which the situations are separated by stanza breaks, it’s obvious that the main situation is the threatening man and the “you” being addressed. Switching to the drunk kids heightens the tension by making the reader shift attention elsewhere for a moment before returning to find out what happens to the “you” and the man. The reader wonders, “Will the kids notice what is happening to this other woman?”

A volley cross-cut can also be used for poems with multiple speakers or viewpoints, as is the case with Adam Vines’ poem “The Hipster Pragmatist and the Emo Poet Blunt Their Teeth after Three Bottles of Mad Dog 20/20 and Adequate Sex.”

The title indicates that two people are speaking in this

poem. By alternating the voices stanza by stanza, Vines helps readers note each distinct voice while rendering visible the interplay of ideas as the two voices talk to, past and at each other.

“Witch Asks, Oven Answers,” by Sally Rosen Kindred, is another fine example of a volley cross-cut. The poem consists of two independent voices, moving evenly back and forth between each voice, using indentation to distinguish between them.

Do you see? Is it safe to believe?
We have Children. We are not alone!
See their leafy skins
flash on the path?

If I could sing, I'd sing
for shells, pockets, the stripped
beak, silence without longing.

What do you think of the girl?
See the care her brother's silver word
scrapes in her cheek.
A hand to warm mine at the pot?

Don't insult us.
The girl's just meat.
Bones
you'll snap off the plate
to suck their last...

You cinderblight. Trap. Box of collapse.
Why make my heart a stone
that won't take these children in?

In some poems for two voices, the monologue of each voice can stand on its own, separate from its counterpart. The interweaving of the voices via cross-cutting can draw attention to additional nuances and meanings in each monologue that would not otherwise be illuminated.

THE SLIVER CROSS-CUT

At the other end of the spectrum, a cross-cutting technique can simply inject “slivers” of another situation or reference point throughout a poem. For example, in Sean Enright's “The Uncanny Valley,” ruminations on puppets and his mother's Parkinson's disease are interrupted with italicized lines drawn from his reading of a Wikipedia entry on the “Uncanny Valley” hypothesis about human reaction to near-human robots or animation.

● THE HIPSTER PRAGMATIST AND THE EMO POET BLUNT THEIR TEETH AFTER THREE BOTTLES OF MAD DOG 20/20 AND ADEQUATE SEX

By Adam Vines

Leaves are more than just leaves –
arbitrary as the arbitrary
letters that invoke them, the letters
suspended, arranged; and, again, suspended
like quivering arrows until bent for meaning like
infinite sets collecting and scattering the infinite.

Leaves are just that: leaves –
matted in a gutter, not matted
by the gutter and christened conceptual found-art, a good-bye
some lame artist names “The Parts of its Sum,”
not an island colonially clear-cut, not
a snake eating its tail, not one anchored “A”
damming the watershed of animus, not some eternal damning.

Crosses are just that: crosses –
electric chairs painted white; electric
white like Good Friday is only white
while the walls of the church, the white wile
congregating in pews loses interest in the sermon. Congregating
crows beyond the crazed glass catch their eyes. “Eat a murder of crows,”
they think, then ask, “who are these “brothers and
sisters” of mine, I, we, they?”

We are more than just that: we –
two quarks, dualities of light, we, one, two,
blue haze before we burn blue.

... I was thinking about puppets, and then
not so much about puppets. It was a failed weather day:
the morning was like early April, sunny climbing
toward 60, then rain came and by noon it was more like
late February. The actual date was March 20. I was
thinking about how important a puppet's face was, or
its facial expression. *Then there is a moment when the
human stops believing and a nervous shock of dread runs
through the person's system.* A puppet can easily watch a
train go by, is made for that sort of attentive noncha-
lance. My mother didn't feel well, she never felt well, we
had recently found she suffered from Parkinson's dis-
ease. But she would not allow that she was afflicted,
much less that it depressed her. I thought about the
thick hedges next-door to my house when I was grow-
ing up, they were un- attended to, and there were large
snails under there, living in a dirty low society. Since it's
March the redbuds are getting traced, they've already
shed one layer of paint on the street at their feet. I kept

thinking about puppets, how creepy they could be if they caught you in suspense, how easy it was to relax and listen to them and not look for their handlers. A *hypothesized graphed curve of the person's level of emotional familiarity violently dips*. I made a list of some money we might have soon and things we could buy. I saw a woman who had just had a miscarriage: she didn't see me: she looked fine. When a puppet's head moves, the whole puppet usually moves, but not these modern Japanese articulated puppets, the heads have a whole range of articulated human-like movements: their necks snap, or arch, they can lengthen in pleasure and in rectitude, their heads crane and bob, and appear ambivalent. They nod and shake in one sinuous motion. *Robotist Mashimo Mori coined the term "uncanny valley" for the dip, to describe the human's adjusting mind suddenly and violently rejecting the similarity as too real, too right, too human...*

The scientific references give a context to Enright's discourse on his reactions to his mother's Parkinson's disease, the woman who just had a miscarriage and his preoccupation with puppets – all circumnavigating a greater theme of human observation, facial expression and the ways in which we attempt to “read” another person's face. When someone we know is depressed or seriously ill, his or her reactions are near to what we expect, but yet we innately recognize a hint of artifice to the reaction, causing us discomfort in the way the “Uncanny Valley” hypothesis explains human reaction to near-human robots. The cross-cutting text from the Wikipedia entry establishes a more substantial link between the speaker's reflections on puppets and his thoughts about his mother and the woman who had the miscarriage.

Another example of what I have termed the sliver cross-

● IDIOT GREEN SALAD

By Cynthia Marie Hoffman

Tell me the story of the mercury gilding of the dome at St. Isaac's Cathedral, and do you remember the number of people who died and whether the vapors swayed with faintly human expression as they rose. The 400 kilograms of real gold, 4 bell towers, 40 tons of marble, 40,000 workers, 40 years' construction. Each of the workers' two hands, one pressed to the cold

140-ton red granite column, the other to his heaving chest. Can you give me directions to the Café Idiot? I have looked forward to lettuce, cucumber, tomato, orange, avocado, and nut.

How many gallons of gray paint were necessary to hide the gold from the Nazis. Whether the men dropped off the dome or collapsed later in their homes. Whether it burned.

If at night, at the sink, the bright trail of blood seeping to the drain startled them one by one. Whether the workers wandered the cathedral, lost. If the shimmering

dome can be seen from the shores of the Neva Bay Dostoyevsky was pardoned at the execution scaffold, a sword broken over his head. If the spirit is roused

by the sight of its godly shimmering. After the herring in spicy sauce, the icefruit cools your tongue. Whether their hands shook. Whether it was worth it.

cut technique is Cynthia Marie Hoffman's “Idiot Green Salad,” in which the two brief interjections emphasize the speaker's distracted state of mind.

In this example, there are but two instances of cutting away from the speaker's questions about the background of the cathedral. It is obvious that the speaker is a tourist, and the brief cross-cuts – with the poem's title – pull us into the mind-set of the tourist who is set on learning about an important historical site, while hunger acts as a nagging distraction.

Just as there are many ways of shuffling a deck of cards, there are differing ways of using cross-cutting in a poem. The cross-cut can be effective for establishing mood, for pulling in external information crucial to exploring a poem's theme and for accentuating connections between seemingly disparate situations or monologues. ■

Bernadette Geyer is a writer, editor and translator living in Berlin, Germany. She is the author of the poetry collection *The Scabbard of Her Throat* and editor of *My Cruel Invention: A Contemporary Poetry Anthology*.



NARRATIVE HOOK

Mary Jo Bang
talks with editor
Alicia Anstead
about voice,
interiority,
suspense and
using your
flaws to find
truth in
your work.

Mary Jo Bang and I met at the Miami Book Fair last November. I had been reading her collection of poems *The Last Two Seconds*, the title of which intrigued me. I mean, that's a title that captures it all. Even before I read the poetry in the book, I was thinking: *All of life comes down to the last two seconds, right? What will you be, what will you see in those two seconds?* I found the title both humorous and frightening. Bang studied sociology in college. She also worked as a photographer and a physician's assistant. You can see that diversity in her poems – a broad sense of the world and a visual commitment. I was a latecomer to poetry. I studied it in college, all the way up to my Ph.D. classes, but I never connected to it until my daughter fell in love with it in high school. She had an extraordinary English teacher who turned her on to contemporary poets. The poems became the stuff of our dinner conversations – including with the teacher. Bang's poetry reminds me of the relevance of poetry, especially having seen poetry so viscerally through my daughter's eyes. Bang's work is approachable, funny, profound and instructive. Pay attention, she seems to say, life is weird and short. The underlying imperative is:

You will benefit from being alive, even if it is painful.

This is lifted in its entirety from the Poetry Foundation page about Bang: She has “received numerous honors and awards for her work, including fellowships from the Guggenheim Foundation and the Bellagio Foundation, and a Hodder Fellowship from Princeton University. She has received a “Discovery”/The Nation award, a Pushcart Prize and her poems have been included in multiple editions of *The Best American Poetry*. The editor of the *Boston Review* from 1995-2005, she is currently a professor at Washington University in St. Louis.” So there are the creds. Our conversation, edited excerpts of which follow, was heady and engaging. And I just want to say: If your last name is Bang, you may be destined to be a poet.

I particularly enjoyed reading “A Man Mentioned in an Essay” in this collection. Even the title drew me in.

We don't usually talk about suspense in poetry. But I think it's an important concept. I want the title to initiate suspense the way a novel chapter heading would or a short story title. I want the reader to have that experience of “And what's that about?” or “Then what happened?” This poem was triggered by reading an article about detective work. Somebody was on a train wearing a sweater. There were tiny pieces of information, and it was interesting to me that so few pieces of information can conjure a person. Sometimes I play with this idea of narrative: How much do you need to feel like you're in the midst of a story? I've been interested lately to see what stories I'm drawn to in the newspaper, because I can't read every story. I don't have time. And it's overwhelming. If I'm reading about, for instance, the events in Paris, I'm drawn into the articles that have a person at the heart of the story. You begin to follow that person's story over the course of the article and sometimes over the course of the next day. There are so many experiences where we do that. We watch television dramas that are transparent about families or an individual, and we see that life.

It's a new script for us – the streaming drama shows. But to have it be the script of our newspapers – where tragedy happens and the narrative unfolds in “What happened to this man?” – it's very fascinating. What's happening in your poem, I think, is that the individual who is a stranger is familiar at the same time. He's someone and no one, which seems to be a theme in all the poems in this collection: What is identity and does it even matter?

Exactly. Experience acts upon a person. There's a constructed speaker in all of my poems, and sometimes it's constructed out of found language. Sometimes it's constructed out of a visual image such as a painting or a text such as *Mrs Dalloway*. And then the speaker gets activated by the world mediated by what I read. It's a very complicated relationship – the speaker and me. I'm a stage director, but I am also the actress. I'm also the author. I'm also the lights. Then I'm in the audience. I'm playing all those roles. In some ways, I'm the divided self, and then I keep shifting focus. What does it feel like, I have to ask myself as the actress. And what does she look like, I have to ask myself as the audience. And does she look like what I wanted her to look like as someone who is feeling X?

With all those components, how do you find the right words? Where do they come from? Do they bubble up, or are they words that come from the voice you hear in the actress?

The words change over time. One of the things I've done as a writer is to learn more words. I do that by reading widely and in all disciplines. I read art criticism. I read science. I read psychology. As I have done that over a lifetime, I know more and more words. One of my anxieties when I first started writing was that my language seemed too plain to address subjects that

were complicated. As I have been able to learn more words, it's easier to paint a scene that might seduce the reader into watching that scene, and then more words for the speaker to speak so that the psychology becomes more nuanced. That's my fear always: that language will make complicated things sound easy. And so I'm always trying to ask myself, “Is it true?” And, “How can one translate something that complicated into language?” It's a difficult job if you take that seriously. Life is complicated. Psychology is complicated – and differently complicated for each of us. I'm just hoping that my complicated interiority will somewhat match someone else's.

How do you parse that with a readership that may find poetry challenging? Your poems require a reader to be present for every word. In a novel, a reader can sometimes cheat. But not in poetry. You have to attend every word. And some people feel poetry is obscure and specialized. Is it the responsibility of a reader to rise to the mission of a poem?

Narrative is one of those hooks that allows someone to enter. That's why I am so keen on establishing suspense so early in the poem. The other thing is sonic momentum – if you begin to work the rhetorical surface, i.e., the language, the expressive potential in sound – there's a point at which the reader will find it easier to stay with the poem and less difficult to walk away from the poem, because you want to get to that moment, and sound is carrying you along. I've learned that over a lifetime of writing, and those are the things I use to give pleasure and to keep the reader with me. The other thing is, every once in a while, I'm aware of the need to establish some sort of bedrock in terms of meaning, and so I titrate those sonic riffs with a moment of clarity. I try to give the reader as much as I think a reader would want, again, without being reductive. For me, sound does that. Situation does it. Characters do it. If I can create the sense of a person – we love eavesdropping, right? – and that person is speaking, there is a desire to overhear what they are saying. If there is some little narrative the person is talking about, again, you start listening more carefully. I only know this by stepping back and having to answer questions about it. It's all intuitive. And the fact is, it's me.

Have you been building that intuition over the years?

Absolutely. You do it by reading and being aware of yourself as a reader, and by writing. Again, reading things that don't usually fall into the category of poetry, and saying to yourself: Why do I love this? Why do I love, say, the Beckett play? Beckett is so self-confident. Beckett gives you permission to do it with confidence, and then people are not as suspicious of what you've done. You'll give them confidence in it if you have confidence in it.

That's hard to know early in a career. Is there something you can tell aspiring poets? This is such a great time for poetry. How can we help?

It is. I always think – and I came to this after many years of reading – that great poetry or even excellent poetry is written by people who are not afraid to reveal their flaws. It's important to know what your flaws are, and I don't mean flaws in a pejorative sense but as: What makes you an individual? Learn to put that in the poem. That's your best bet to write something that is inimitably yours and not a copy of what already exists. It takes confidence to do that because then your work doesn't look like other people's.



Based on flaws, not strengths?

Exactly. I think your flaws *are* your strengths. When I say flaws, I mean your own idiosyncratic way of doing something. And yes, others who read it, perhaps in a workshop setting, will resist that because it's unlike anything they've seen. That's different from something in the poem not working. But somehow find what is a pattern for you and hold onto those patterns. I always tell my students: If that was your sole joy in writing this, then no one should talk you out of it, no matter how wrong they might say it is. If that's what you love doing, then do that because you get very little for writing poetry, relatively speaking – very little, if any, money. So you should get that pleasure, and if that pleasure is a reflection of who you are in the deepest sense, then that is a contribution, because only you could have written those poems.

Where do those unique patterns come from? I don't believe they come from writing. I believe they come from something else.

We could call it personality. T. S. Eliot in "Tradition and the Individual Talent" says that writers don't write to enter emotion but to escape emotion and personality, and that you have to have emotion and personality to know what it is to escape it.

It's so contradictory.

It *is* contradictory. What I believe he means by that is that those easy answers to emotion or what we call emotion – those words we continually associate with emotional subjectivity – those are a trap because they are not really yours. And if you avoid those, you're going to put something in the poem in lieu of it, and it's going to be your deepest thoughts. And you can say: Well, isn't that emotion? Yes and no. It's not emotion as poetry has traditionally defined it. You will find the essence of yourself if you're not trying to write emotional poems. I think that is what Eliot is saying.

Do you care how people see your poems?

Hmm. That's a good question. I do care, but I don't do anything different based on that caring, because I have to write

the poem that I want to write. Certainly I bring to bear everything when I am writing that I know in terms of being a reader. I hope that my knowledge of being a reader and what I like will inform the poem, and that someone else will take pleasure in it.

It's exciting to think people will hear your story in a poem, but also their own.

Exactly. I have come to see the page to be a social space. It's even a bit of a narcissistic mirror where I see myself. But what's interesting is that others look in it and see themselves. I try to stay a little in the background, so I can both see myself but allow other people to mirror their own experiences.

I see that in this collection of poems, that, as a reader, you can focus on the humor or go with an existential approach.

One thing I would like to say about this book is that there is a lot of humor in it. I worry that it's been described as dystopic without recognizing there's a lot of humor, that in fact humor is what gets us through. And even those poems that have speakers in dire circumstances, like walking through the set of *The Doomsday Clock* movie, what they say is funny. So it's a braid of anxiety and the humor that I use to deal with that anxiety, and I think there's a lot of pleasure to be had in the way those two things operate.

I'm so glad you brought up humor. I agree with you – from the cover straight through to the writing. Could you talk about what makes good humor on the page?

Again, this is a function of who I am. This is the way I view the world. You can say these match my flaws, that these poems match my person, that not everyone, not anyone, has my personality. I can't give a formula of how to do that, but I do know that when I wrote my first book and showed it to a friend, he mentioned that, while he liked the poems, he found no humor in them, and that I was a very funny person. He found it interesting that I had left that part of myself out. It was a revelation because I think I had this received idea of what a poem was, and it was some kind of serious meditation. His mentioning that made me realize that if I were to put my full self in, I would put in that aspect of myself as well. I've enjoyed doing that ever since. I have been eternally grateful to him for bringing that to my attention – that I had left that whole part of myself out.

Thank God for a sense of humor, right? There's almost nothing it won't grapple with.

Yes, exactly. ■

Alicia Anstead is editor-in-chief of *The Writer*. She is also editor and co-founder of the Harvard Arts Blog.

Naming PARNESHIA

A poet discusses her first collection.


BY ROBERT HIRSCHFIELD

PARNESHIA JONES' FATHER heard the name Parnassus in a movie and named his daughter Parneshia. Perhaps it has to do with being grandly named in her own right, but names stoutly mark *Vessel*, Parneshia Jones' first published book of poetry: Muriel Rukeyser, O.W. Starling (grandfather), Marvin Gaye, Nazim Hikmet, Gwendolyn Brooks, Sara Ross (great grandmother), Anna Mag-nani, Mae West, Barack Obama.

Naming and giving flesh to names are central to Jones' poetry. The poet from Evanston, Illinois, burnishes *Vessel* with impeccable formalism, elliptical riffs and short works Such as "Haiku for Bernice, Louisiana":

My father born here
Bernice, Louisiana.
Anyone seen him?





Poetry editor of Triquarterly Books at Northwestern University, Jones writes in many voices (“I am many different people. There are many different sides to all of us.”), but edits with the voice of empathic insight.

“In some of the first books I have published, there can be a wobbliness in structure,” she says. “And there sometimes may be too many words. Completely understandable for authors of first books. But a poem is like a quilt. The stitching has to be consistent.”

Vessel is a reed boat of tight stitching. These lines are from “For the Basement Parties at the YMCA”:

House of pain and Pearl Jam
spill from oversized speakers.
Walls sweat, pooling the floor
with rhapsody and rhythm.
Pressed together, underground
surrounded by sound, thirteen
years of wondering comes down to
double dares and discoveries
in the black lights of the basement.

Jones admits to difficulties with line breaks. Her method is to tie line breaks to breath. But she finds, in reading poems over, the rhythm of her breath tends to change, causing indecision.

“I tell my authors who worry about line breaks to see where the break feels comfortable and go with that,” she says. “Don’t force it or it won’t read right. I encourage them to read writers such as Natasha Trethewey and Mary Oliver who seem skilled at how they break up lines. I look at different poets to see what they are precise at. I really urge people who struggle with line breaks to read form poetry.”

Baltimore-based Reginald Harris, whose second volume *Autogeography* was edited by Jones, recalls her approach to one of his jazz poems, “*Baltimore Uproar* by Romare Bearden.” She wanted clarification about a line that referred to Cab Calloway, but stopped short of mentioning him by name: “fly-brimmed hipsters high on Hi de Ho.”

“Well, it sounds great, you know, all these guys decked out in fancy suits and hats and all that stuff,” says Harris. “She said, ‘OK, do you want to keep it general? Will readers get it? Or do you want to say who this is?’”

Even in editing, there’s concern for naming.

Harris kept it general. “But she made me think, how specific do I want to be?” he says. “Do I want to start naming? She really cares for what the author has done. She wants to make your book the best representation of your voice, which is what you want in an editor.”

In grade school at Evanston, Jones read traditionalists, such as Robert Frost and Langston Hughes, and fell in love with poetry.

“The teachers used to read poetry to us, and not just during National Poetry Month,” she says. “We read a different poet every day, and we were assigned to write poetry. The first poem I ever wrote was about my little brother.”

She doesn’t remember the poem, but she remembers her parents kept a copy of it.

Jones’ marvels at the synchronicity in her writing life. At Chicago State University, when she was 19 and barely writing poetry at all – she recalls having three poems to her name – the poet Gwendolyn Brooks, then a professor at Chicago State, announced that she would be choosing five student poetry writers to meet with. Those interested had to submit seven to 10 poems.

“My journalism professor encouraged me to submit the three poems I had, including the one on my little brother, and I was chosen,” says Jones. “Brooks gave me books to read. She wrote notes on my poems. She taught me how real poetry could be. She didn’t need a lot of fluffy language to be a truth teller in poetry.”

Brooks could not have known it at the time but note dispensing was something her student would find essential to her editorial career. Jones declares with good-natured ferocity: “When I am working on a manuscript, I am a woman of notes. My authors get notes about where certain poems need development, about changing the order in which poems are written, because in some cases there seems there is a hole right here between this poem and that.”

The confluence of elements that brought *Vessel* into being still mystifies her. “I like to say it was a result of a poetry reading in the Bronx” – under the auspices of the Dreamyard Project – “Caroline Kennedy” – who was present at the reading and used Jones’ poem “Bra Shopping” in an anthology – “and a cubicle in New Jersey” – where she encountered Publishers West Group’s Peg O’Donnell who recommended her to Milkweed, which ferried *Vessel* into the world.

Critics have noted that one of Jones’ strengths is the way she funnels black history through the

echo chamber of family with roots in the deep South. Her hunger to regenerate those roots is reminiscent of the literature of second-generation American Jewish writers recreating the Jewish ghetto of Eastern Europe that their parents and grandparents came from.

Jones writes in "Congregation: Mississippi 1984":

Six daughters gather space and time
in a small kitchen.
Recipes old as the cauldron.
Aprons wrap around the daughters
keepers of iron and collective.

"I grew up around storytellers," she says. "My grandmother was a storyteller. My grandpop was a storyteller. As the youngest one around, I was trained to listen. I was raised in my grandfather's juke joints. He came up from Mississippi, and had these blues clubs. My first dog came from Roman gypsies who hung out outside his clubs."

She advises young poets to be open to their families, to the mystery of roots, to the voices heard in childhood. The craft of listening was the first craft Jones mastered in her life. Telling the poetic story grew out of it.

"We are the northern folktales," she writes in the poem "Legacy." Also these lines:

A harvest of migrating hearts
tell our way back when
we are porch stories, buttermilk aprons,
lovers of Sundays and sailboats.

Land of dew-winged cardinals with chandelier
forests preserves our pioneers and preachers.

We are the long grass and the anxious wind,
the generations, speaking softly, between
the lines of history.

Lee Briccetti, poet and executive director of Poets House in New York City, says Jones is "one of those kinds of writers who sees herself as the dream of her ancestors, the hope of her ancestors. There is really that sense in her work. Stanley Kunitz said, 'Poetry is the most sensitive historical recording device, telling us what it feels like to be alive in a certain time and place.'"

When *Vessel* left her to begin its journey in the world, Jones thought, "Well, it's time to let go of

it." But it occurred to her that her second collection, about her younger brother, an Iraq War veteran fatally struck down by a car upon returning home to Chicago, was a continuation of her first.

"*Vessel* allowed me to be rooted in who I was as a writer, and where I come from," she says. "In the next book, I am a little stronger, more gritty in terms of what I am writing about. It is because of *Vessel*, I am able to go a lot deeper than I would otherwise."

Jones' view of poetry, her own especially, was opened by a crucial insight as an MFA student at Spalding University in Kentucky. Participating in cross-genre workshops with prose writers, she found herself intimidated by the abundance of space they had in their story telling.


It forced her to look with new eyes at the landscape of poetry and the tightrope of precision by which it is governed – and against which poets always feel the urge to rebel, resulting in the radical shape-shifting of lines and the embrace and desertion of forms.

"I realized I had plenty of space," she says. "I just wasn't using it. That's when my more narrative poems started to come. Poems such as 'Bra Shopping' and 'French Kiss.' I became aware I didn't necessarily have to be confined to a form or even a line break."

Her poem "Definition" consists of two charts – Parnassus and Parneshia – that seek to define each entity according to place and poetry. The poem is formed by ethnology and geography.

The poem emphasizes that Jones is fearless in exploring her own kind of landscaping in poetry.

"I have a great love of maps," she says. "I love drawings – seeing how far away things are, and how close they come. I also love stamps. All the details there can be in such small spaces, seeing those squares and what can fit into those squares. I have recently been falling in love with Sardinia, and I realize, though it's part of Italy, it is closer in proximity to mainland Africa."

Jones' map of Italy takes the shape of Anna Magnani, the combustible neo-realist actor who died before Jones was born. A strange choice at first glance. Magnani was a larger than life disruptor of Italian cinema, a notorious sacred monster. Like Jones, Magnani was born into poverty, emptied her being into her art, fought for her reality. Which means: She is perfect for map-making. 

Robert Hirschfield is freelance writer and poet in New York.



BY AUBREY EVERETT

MAIN COURSE

FOR
SCREEN-
WRITER
AND PLAY-
WRIGHT
WINNIE
HOLZMAN,
COMEDY
IS NOT A
DESSERT.
IT'S PART
OF THE
SO-CALLED
POINT.

Nile Scott Shots/Nile Hawver.



Winnie Holzman's play
Choice was performed last
fall at the Huntington
Theatre Company in Boston.
Photos: T. Charles Erickson



Winnie Holzman has written for stage, screen and her own personal enjoyment. Her style is to infuse real-life drama with comedic relief. She writes what she likes to read, and she writes what she likes to watch.

Best known for her work as creator and lead writer of the short-lived but universally loved TV series *My So-Called Life* and for writing the book for the stage musical *Wicked*, Holzman has spent her career writing for actors and making frequent cameos in her own productions.

Her most recent work, *Choice*, a comedic play about a very serious topic, premiered last fall at Boston's Huntington Theatre Company. It examines the complexities of family and friendship while giving audience members one-liners such as "I was a philosophy major with a concentration in yarn" – spoken by a post-grad millennial wrapped in a thickly woven shawl.

It is with these quick, witty lines that Holzman draws listeners in and keeps them near. She takes her work seriously but is astutely aware of the comedic moments that surround us in life. Why ignore them? Holzman harnesses those bits of hilarity to make TV shows and stage productions to which people relate.

PREP

It all started with poetry – although Holzman admits that she has not written a stanza in years. In the undergraduate creative writing program at Princeton University, Holzman spent four years writing poetry and won a prize from the Academy of

American Poets. Eventually, poetry led to comedy writing, which led to writing for actors onstage and in film. Poetry moved to the background.

She hasn't written a line of poetry since college, but the lessons she learned from that period – the economy of words, the rhythm of a sentence, the power of choosing a single word – are infused in everything she has written since. The feeling she gets from the sound of a certain word is a powerful compass.

"I feel very strongly about everything that I learned and everything that I was practicing when I was a person who wrote poetry. It really fed my screenwriting and my TV writing and my comedy writing and, certainly, my lyric writing," said Holzman. "My poetry led very directly, in a lot of different ways, to how I write. People might not make that connection. But I make the connection."

Many writers find comfort within one style or another, but not Holzman.

"It all feels like different aspects of the same thing. It's just me being a writer," she said. "Different subjects present themselves in different ways. A certain idea may come up and you go, well, that's for the theater, or a play, or that could be a musical. It's an intuitive thing."

MARINATE

A writer's location can greatly affect the final product, and each one has preferences and process. Picture Holzman in her shed-



turned-backyard writing retreat. It's a small, comfortable space that her husband, actor and writer Paul Dooley, created. No phone, just a computer and her imagination. Holzman wrote much of *Wicked* there, and while it proved the ideal setting for that particular project, she admits that mixing up her scenery can allow ideas to flow.

"What I tend to do these days is a combo platter. I get to a point where I get a little stir crazy, and I don't like to be only in one place. Sometimes I write sitting or lying on my bed," said Holzman. "That tends to be a thing I do. A lot. I've got to admit."

Or she will visit the freelance writers' trustworthy retreat – the coffee shop. It's a place where she has found writing prosperity throughout her career.

"I'm around people who – hopefully – aren't going to talk to me," she said. "They are busy doing their thing. I like to have a quiet buzz around me that doesn't involve me. I like music. Sometimes I'll get obsessed with certain music that I'll play during a project. There isn't any one way."

Where does she try to avoid doing her writing? In an office – which can prove difficult when working on a TV show. In addition to *My So-Called Life*, Holzman was on the writing team for the ABC series' *thirtysomething*, which ran for four seasons, and *Once and Again*, which lasted three.

"When you are in production on a TV show, you sometimes end up having to write in an office because your office is right there near the set and they kind of need you around," said Holzman. "That's something I've certainly done, but I don't do it by choice."

In addition to serving as her cottage builder, Dooley is also one of Holzman's first readers after she completes a draft. Her daughter Savannah, also a writer, participates early in the process as well.

"You can't overuse anybody, even your daughter or your husband," said Holzman. "You have to be honest with the person about what you want."

Sometimes she will tell a reader that all she needs is some encouragement or point out a specific character that is giving her trouble. The editing and revision process has to be very meticulous.

"You have to get real about what kind of feedback you want," she said. "If you

"A certain idea may come up and you go, well that's for the theater, or a play, or that could be a musical. It's an intuitive thing."

are going to ask someone to give hard-earned time to something you are privately working on, you have to be thoughtful about it."

LAST CALL

In 1994, the character Angela Chase, played by Claire Danes, walked onto the small screen and changed the trajectory of teen dramas, and, some say, an entire generation. Holzman created *My So-Called Life* with a small cast and crew and free filming locations. (Real students and teachers occupied the fictional Liberty High School during

filming, so only certain parts of the building could be filmed.) The show ran from August 1994 until January 1995. It turned into the single season that has gone down in TV lore. It continues to appear on lists with titles such as "Best 100 Shows" and "Canceled Too Soon." Fans, new and old, flock to IMDB message boards to comment on whether Angela's mother Patty is mean or to compare the show to the other prematurely dumped teen favorite, *Freaks and Geeks*.

My So-Called Life was Holzman's big-time entree to the show business world, but perhaps that world wasn't quite ready for what she had to give. Despite critical acclaim and rabid viewership, the show was canceled in May 1995, and Holzman had to figure out what to do next.

"It wasn't devastating. I might have been sad for a day or two because I would miss everyone, and I did have in mind some plans for the show. But I really came to a good place pretty quickly," Holzman said.

Last October, in preparation for the opening of *Choice*, the Huntington hosted a screening of the pilot episode of *My So-Called Life*. The theater was packed with viewers – many of the age of those who had watched the series during its initial run – reliving the fragile and charged lives of Angela



and her boyfriend Jordan Catalano (played by Jared Leto). Rewatching that episode in the current culture and political climate, the character's problems and worries reach across a generation, perhaps all generations, and still ring true.

Before playing the episode, Holzman sat onstage with Boston's local NPR radio host Robin Young to talk about the show. While discussing the hasty cancellation, Holzman had a dispassionate outlook, remarking that if the series had continued, the process could have been derailed or storylines could have gone astray. Instead, she said, one perfect 920-minute capsule will never be altered.

"I feel like it was perfect the way it was," Holzman told the audience. "The perspective that I got back then was that it's really important to define for yourself what is success. Did we express ourselves in a meaningful way? And that's what I believe."

In short, she didn't miss a beat.

"I moved on to the next thing I was going to write," she said. "That's what we do as writers. We move on to the next thing. And that's what it is to have a career as a writer. It's really not about getting canceled. It's about: Did you put your heart into it? How hard did you work?"

SPECIALS

In a similar way to *My So-Called Life*, the theatrical work *Choice* takes a deep dive into emotional layers that can enhance and complicate a single choice. It's a comedy about a serious topic, which is Holzman's strong suit: slipping comedy into

"It's really important to define for yourself what is success. Did we express ourselves in a meaningful way? And that's what I believe."

serious and sometimes controversial moments and scenes.

"I'm not really interested to write about a subject that's deep and complex and intense without using comedy to some extent," said Holzman. "Comedy is a huge, integral part of our lives. And it's also something that makes us human. It's too big to leave out."

"Comedy is not dessert. It's not like, oh, let's have a little comedy."

Choice is about abortion. The particular choice central to the action has already been made, many decades ago, but it resurfaces in the relationships between a mother and daughter, and the mother and her friend. A

prickly topic, to be certain, but Holzman doesn't downplay the seriousness. Rather, she brings light to the humane and very real discussion of such experiences.


"To me, it's very natural to put a very serious topic with comedy," she said. "It's not like I'm trivializing the subject, which people might think I mean when I say I put comedy with the subject of abortion. I think I give abortion a very deep look. And comedy is one of the tools that I use to do that."

Holzman's writing voice easily melds the two topics, and she's consistent about writing what she likes.

"As an audience member, when I go to see something, what I'm most interested in is the play between the comic and the dramatic. That's what I created in *Choice*, because that's what I'm interested in seeing when I go to the theater," said Holzman. "*Wicked* is a different thing. But it is similar in that it really has fun with light-hearted moments and wildly out-there moments and dramatic moments."

NEXT UP

After her turn on Boston's theatrical scene, Holzman's next project brings her back to TV. Last fall, she was working with Cameron Crowe and J. J. Abrams on a comedic project called *Roadies*, which will take a peek into the backstage operations of a touring rock band. The pilot has been picked up by Showtime.

In the meantime, Hulu is streaming all 19 episodes of *My So-Called Life*, giving an entirely new generation of viewers access to Holzman's unique and candid style of writing. 

Aubrey Everett is a writer and editor in the Boston area.



Pitch, write, repeat.

Build an ongoing relationship with editors.

You got the assignment, filed the story and cashed the check.

What now?

Get a repeat assignment, of course.

Most freelancers will attest that while getting a second assignment is definitely easier than getting the first, far too many clients end up being one-offs, and second assignments never happen.

How can you ensure that the editor who gave you that first assignment will give you a second, third and more? Here are some ways to keep those relationships going and those checks rolling in.

1 Consistently send good ideas.

Persistence is one of the most important character traits a writer must have to survive in this business, followed closely by the ability to generate good ideas consistently. Put these two together, and you have the

recipe for second-assignment success.

When an editor knows your name and is familiar with your work (and, needless to say, is happy with it), send through more ideas that would be a fit for his or her publication. You may not always hit the mark, but editors appreciate it when you keep trying, even if you're failing. It tells them that you're interested in working with them on an ongoing basis. If there's one thing freelancers can forget, it's that editors like ongoing relationships just as much as writers do.

2 Send new ideas right away.

When I was a green freelancer a decade ago, I operated like this: Send an idea, receive an acceptance, write the story, send the invoice, get paid, receive the published story in the mail and, then and only then, pitch another idea.

Do you see the flaw – and the time lost – in this methodology?

These days, I'm a lot more impatient, and that's not a bad thing.

After I wrap up an assignment and send off the final edits and the invoice, I submit another idea almost immediately. What is, after all, to be gained by waiting?

3 Learn quickly.

You know how I said that editors love writers they can work with regularly? There's a caveat: You have to make their lives easier.

It is far less time-consuming and much less hassle to work with a writer who already knows the house style, the topics an editor's interested in and the general workings of a publication.

Learn everything you can during your first few assignments. The more ingrained you are in the process, the less work your editor has to do on your manuscript and the more likely he or she is to assign work to you again.


4 Add value to the publication.

Freelancers sometimes see themselves as separate from a publication, and while that is true – you have your own business to run, after all – it can be helpful, especially when you're new to a publication, to try and be a part of the team. Think like a staffer and go one step further by suggesting additional material such as sidebars and photography.

When I worked in India, I often offered to connect my American editors with local photographers for stories I'd reported on, for instance. You could ask if there are blogging opportunities or if they've got holes in the editorial calendar that need filling. Act like you belong, and you will.

5 Be appreciative.

Freelancing can be a thankless job, but so too can editing. Not many freelancers take the time to tell editors who've slaved over stories that they did a great job. Years ago, after a particularly harsh edit, my editor was expecting pushback from me. Instead, I was fascinated. Her edits had tightened my writing and made it stronger, and I learned dozens of tricks that have served me in my career. She was surprised to hear my absolute joy in being edited and my immense gratitude for what she had taught me. Needless to say, she was happy to work with me again.

An editor who has enjoyed working with you is much more likely to want you writing for him or her regularly. Make it a pleasant experience for him or her, and you'll have more second, third and fourth assignments than you can count. 

Mridu Khullar Relph is a journalist and the publisher of *The International Freelancer*.



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Poetry camp

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“I had been coming to New Hampshire mountains. And here I am and what am I to say?”

—From “New Hampshire” by Robert Frost

If you travel to the heart of New Hampshire, you will reach a notch in the White Mountains. The highway guides you, snaking past the ski trails that have made Olympians famous, the roadside wallows where moose gather at twilight, the now-barren rock face from which the Old Man once watched over the valley. The peace and beauty of Franconia Notch drew another famous name, and his legacy lives on through poetry, education and a combination of the two at the farm that bears his name: The Frost Place.

The physical focal point of the property is the original farmhouse where Robert Frost and his family lived on Ridge Road. It houses a poet in residence, and its front porch is open year round for people to sit and draw inspiration from the vistas that captivated the four-time Pulitzer Prize winner. The poetic focal point is the series of three conferences held annually in the summer: the Conference on Poetry and Teaching, the Conference on Poetry and the Poetry Seminar.

If you’re looking for workshops on fiction or nonfiction, you won’t find any, notes The Frost Place executive director Maudelle Driskell: “It’s all poetry, all the time.”

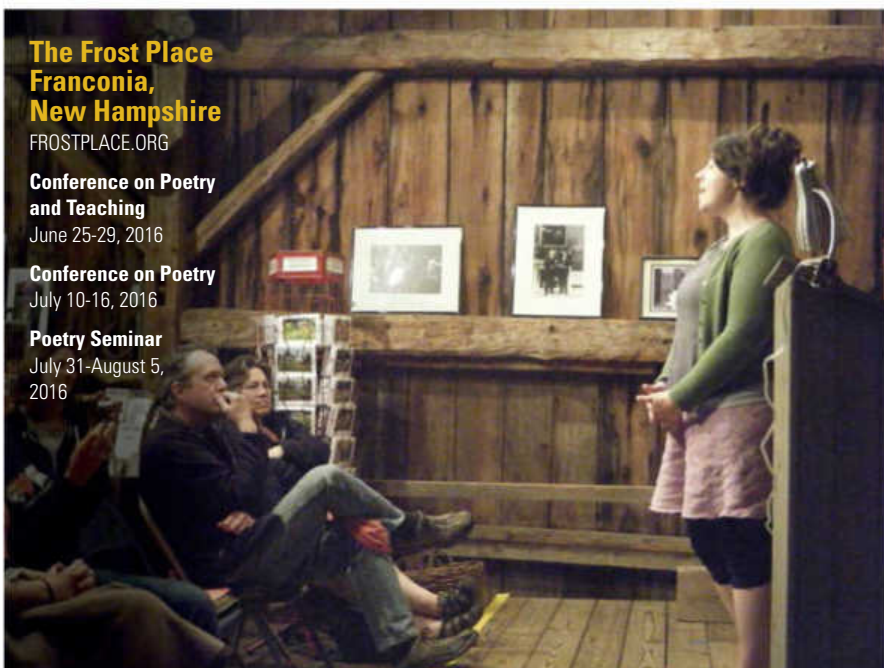
In addition to being a poet, Frost was an educator. “He was so engaged by teaching in a way that he was not engaged by farming or anything else, that

he said, ‘I can’t teach and write poems. I’m too engaged,’” says Driskell.

It is in that spirit that Maine Poet Laureate Baron Wormser founded the Conference on Poetry and Teaching. His aim was to give educators the techniques they need to teach poetry in the classroom, to appreciate it and process it logically. “It

makes the teaching of poems approachable in a real way,” Driskell says. “It presents certain poems as examples, but it allows the educators to internalize a method to process these things.”

Part of the conference is practicum, during which teachers of every age level present lessons. The other part is com-



munity building that occurs during the four-day conference and continues virtually throughout the rest of the year. The last part of the conference is called Teachers as Writers, a day-and-a-half intensive writing workshop lead this year by Afaa Michael Weaver. The session allows teachers to learn what it means to be a poet and better relate to the mindset of a poet when teaching their students. “Teachers are not necessarily poets,” Driskell says. “For some of them, this will be the first time that they’ve written poetry.” Its placement at the end of the Conference on Poetry and Teaching is intentional. “[In] poetry and writing and presenting work to each other, one of those things is that people need to feel like they’re in good, strong hands in a safe environment. We try to provide that,” says Driskell.

Two weeks later, another crowd comes to town for the Conference on Poetry, headed by poet and publisher Martha Rhodes. Although it is the largest and longest conference that The Frost Place hosts, the vibe is intimate and energetic, and faculty and participants alike engage with craft. The wide age range, varying levels of writing experience and diverse backgrounds create a community in which writers are exposed to diverse opinions and responses. “You get everything from the surface level of how this poem works. If it’s a narrative or a lyric, does it work well? Are there red herrings here? Are we going off into the ether?” Driskell says. “[It’s about] hearing how people read and understand, and the first time that you get response to this poem, all the way down to very deep analysis on a lyric or narrative level from someone who looks at it in a very different way.”

Although the faculty rotates every year, the caliber of each member remains consistent, with Guggenheim and MacArthur prize winners among them. Their interaction with attendees fosters a dedication to craft and in an almost

scared-straight way encourages attendees to bring a level of rigor and seriousness to the table. “When you sit down with someone like Patrick Donnelly or Gregory Pardlow, who was the Pulitzer Prize winner in Poetry for 2015, or Afaa Weaver the year he won the Kingsley Tufts,” Driskell says, “you’re really forced to bring your A-game.”


Driskell, who has an MFA from Warren Wilson College and teaches at Sarah Lawrence College, also attends lectures during the conference. “These are people I would want to teach me and look at my work,” she says. “You’re getting to really work very closely with the cream of the crop.”

The summer conference season ends with the Poetry Seminar, headed by Patrick Donnelly. The drill-down session is made up of a smaller group of poets and focuses on fewer topics.

“The Frost Place as a whole has been dedicated to the legacy of Frost and to the appreciation and creation of poems,” says Driskell. Part of that is accomplished by inviting community members to read their favorite Frost poem before the night’s reading in the Henry Holt Barn (Frost’s actual barn).

Driskell opens each reading with some remarks, during which she tells the crowd to turn and look out at the mountains, the same ones in Frost’s books and letters to his friend and fellow poet Louis Untermeyer. “It’s a place of living legacy,” says Driskell. “And it’s a legacy of one of our greatest poets. And there’s something that feels very magical about it. That feels as if you’re still tied to that place and you’re still tied to him. And I think it calls to us in a way that other places would not.”

“This place changes you in some fundamental way,” she adds.

When you get up to the New Hampshire mountains, what will *you* say? 

Meredith Quinn is managing editor of *The Writer* and a graduate of New York University.

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Arresting diversity

Solstice editors look for deep analyses of social issues.

In 2009, novelist Lee Hope founded *Solstice Magazine* to promote diversity in the arts. Since then, she has published work from a prisoner on death row, a former migrant worker, several veterans and writers from Africa, Australia, England, Germany, Ukraine.

“Given what’s going on in the world – the violence between different ethnicities and religions,” Hope says, “a magazine promoting diversity is especially important and even more relevant than it was six years ago.”

The tri-quarterly online publication seeks poetry, fiction, nonfiction and photography from both established and emerging writers. The Sol-

stice Institute, the magazine’s affiliated nonprofit, sponsors literary contests and conducts outreach to community writing groups of diverse backgrounds with the goal of including new voices in the magazine.

“What do we mean by diversity?” Hope asks. “Race, ethnicity, gender, class and religion represented in the arts and elsewhere.”

Tone, editorial content

Hope and her staff embrace controversial topics to inspire dialogue among readers. One such essay is “Color Him Father” by Jabari Asim. “It’s an amazing essay about African American fatherhood and the

misconceptions that are out there,” says Hope.

Here’s Asim: “Failing to honor those who do right threatens to consign them to the same sketchy outlines inhabited by absent fathers, threatens to wash away their images as steadily as the rain that fell on my brothers and me amid the assorted fragments of my father’s life.”

Solstice editors look for the same deep analysis of social issues in fiction and poetry. They nominated Meena Alexander’s “Little Burnt Holes,” a poem inspired by the jury selection process, for a Pushcart Prize this year. Alexander writes: “The hat I wanted is cut of mink, fit for a brutal season. It

“We publish writers of diverse nationalities, races and religions, and also writers from diverse cultures within our culture.”

Tri-quarterly, online

Genres: Fiction, poetry, nonfiction

Reading period: Year-round

Length: Up to 35 pages

Submission format: Digital submission on website

Contact: Lee Hope, editor
info@solsticelitmag.org
solsticelitmag.org



Courtesy The Frost Place

has prickles of fur, dirt colored like the faces of prisoners afloat in the courtroom.”

Contributors

Along with Asim’s essay about fatherhood, Mary Collins’ exploration of her brother’s suicide in “The Coverless Book” earned a notable mention in *Best American Essays*. The piece begins:

“The service at the crematorium was, by design, a godless affair. Daniel’s slender body was consumed in an eco-friendly cardboard coffin to the accompaniment of Heaven 17’s *Temptation*, one of the few hits that had ever ignited in him the courage to dance.”

Collins’ essay also won the *Solstice* nonfiction contest in 2014, along with a place in the inaugural print anthology *SolLit Selects: Five Years of Diverse Voices*.

While the magazine’s nonfiction editors prefer writing that explores contemporary societal issues, fiction and poetry editors look for eclectic work. *Solstice*’s co-poetry editor Ben Berman gravitates toward Stuart Friebert’s translations of German poet Karl Krolow’s writing and Wendy Mnookin’s narrative poem “Russian

Novel,” about escaping a backyard barbecue to read *Anna Karenina* in the host’s study.

In an excerpt from his memoir *Hook* in the winter 2016 issue, Randall Horton explores homelessness, drug addiction and smuggling and incarceration. “We look for pieces that go beyond their own stories,” Hope says, “to relate to problems in society.”

Advice for potential contributors

Solstice editors want arresting, voice-driven submissions. “One way to really get our attention is to enter our contests,” Hope says, referring to the magazine’s annual awards for fiction, nonfiction and the Stephen Dunn Prize in Poetry.

She welcomes experimentation and colliding points of view. “We believe probing into diversity can promote unity,” editors write on the magazine’s website. “We want to shake things up. Cause some ferment. After all, *Solstice* is renewal.” 

Melissa Hart is a nonfiction instructor in the Whidbey Island MFA program. She’s the author of *Wild Within: How Rescuing Owls Inspired a Family* and *Avenging the Owl*.

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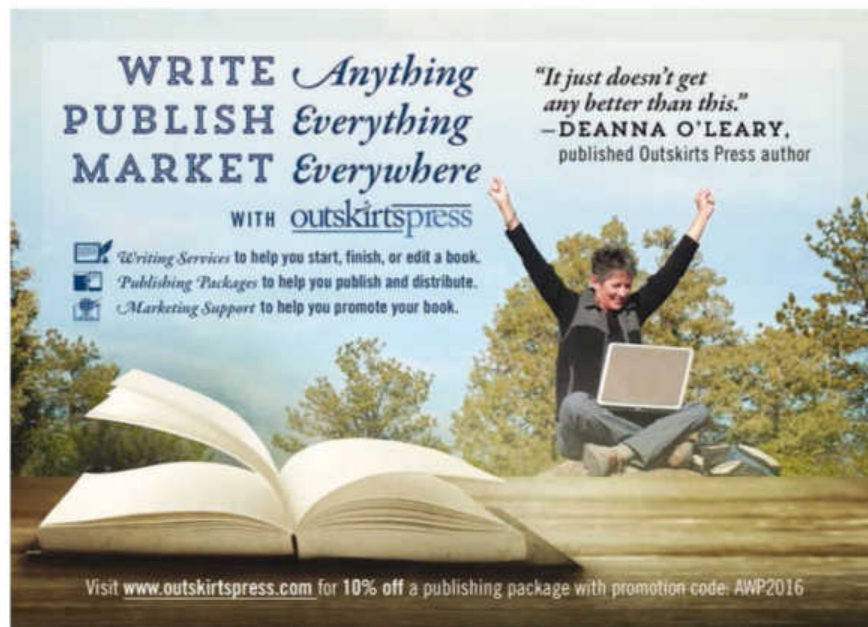
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F = Fiction N = Nonfiction P = Poetry
C = Children's Y = Young adult O = Other

Moving parts

When it comes to getting published, the spinning cogs seem endless. Here are resources to guide you from the first inspiration to the first set of reader eyes.

The following listings are a sampling of what the industry has to offer. For a complete guide, visit writermag.com.

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N \$ EMMY Bimonthly television industry magazine for TV professionals and enthusiasts. Official publication of the Academy of Television Arts & Sciences. No highly technical articles or academic/fan-magazine type articles. Best section for newcomers is "Labors of Love," the 500-word, front-of-the-book profiles of TV people. **Contact:** Editor, Emmy, 5220 Lankershim Blvd., North Hollywood, CA 91601. emmys.com/emmymag

N \$ OPERA NEWS Publishes articles of interest for the opera professional and the opera buff. No fiction, poetry or personal remembrances. Submit query or manuscript and published writing samples via email. **Contact:** Kitty March, Opera News, 70 Lincoln Center Plaza, Fl. 6, New York, NY 10023. info@operanews.com
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N \$ ADVISOR TODAY Membership publication for the National Association of Insurance and Financial Advisors. Publishes stories that give readers

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Contests and journals for poetry

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subter@portal.ca subterrain.ca

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pshares@pshares.org pshares.org

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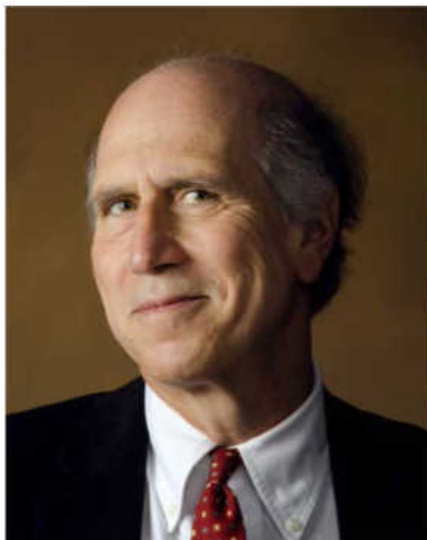
A professor of creative writing at Appalachian State University and former poet laureate of North Carolina, Joseph Bathanti writes both poetry and prose. In many ways, his endeavors as poet laureate were a continuation of the community-based work he has pursued for almost 40 years. Through his readings and workshops, Bathanti has delivered poetry and other forms of literature to marginalized populations that might not otherwise have been exposed to the form. These include prisoners, veterans, patients in hospitals and those in homeless shelters.

His poetry has been largely inspired by his work in prisons. Inspiration also comes from life in rural North Carolina and from his working-class experiences in Pittsburgh, his beloved hometown.

Bathanti's book of poetry *The 13th Sunday after Pentecost*, out later this year, focuses on the Italian American, Catholic roots and culture of East Liberty, the Pittsburgh neighborhood where he grew up.

Poetry or prose

When I'm seized by an image – it usually starts with an image or random memory – and I know I'm going to write about it, I conceive of that composition as a poem. That is my initial reflex. However, once into the actual writing, the work takes on a mind of its own and sometimes metamorphoses into fiction or nonfiction. In some cases, my subject matter demands a discursiveness that poetry won't accommodate, or I'll find that a straight-up account of something that actually happened is much more effective than trying to bend an autobiographical experience into fiction. On



other occasions, I need the imaginative detachment – the scrim to stand behind – that fiction provides.

Accessibility

When I first started writing poetry as a high schooler, I adopted what I call "The Seven Layers of Enigma" model. I wrote a verse that I did not understand, but was sure that others would marvel at simply because it was so inscrutable. I wrote this way because I had found few poems – dished out to me in school by well-meaning teachers – that I understood in the vein that one understands prose. Once I began reading on my own and discovered poems and poets that used clear language that told stories, I was evangelized, and my poems became more narrative, more rooted in stories, often about working-class citizens, and much more accessible to hopefully everyone, including folks who don't typically like poetry. Robert Lowell, in his poem, "Epilogue," writes "Yet why not say what happened?" I ascribe to that.

Style

I'm decidedly a narrative poet, although I don't let that get in the way if I want to step outside those lines and fool around with other kinds of deliveries, and I'm also very fond of writing sonnets, as well as writing in other traditional forms. Nevertheless, I do find my central story in narrative because, at heart, I'm a storyteller. Robert Creeley once famously said, "Form is never more than an extension of content." I do start a poem with a notion of style and shape, but tend to allow Creeley's dictum to guide the ultimate temperament and form the finished poem will take.

Writing routine

In the best of worlds, I would sit down daily first thing in the morning and write for a number of hours, and probably come back to it for a number of hours later in the day. There have been spates in my life where I've actually been able to do that. But as my wife Joan and I began to raise a family, and as my professional life became more complicated and time-consuming, I've had to radically adjust my daily writing life. My aspiration upon waking every morning is to write – and indeed I do make it to the writing table in my head on a daily basis – but often the realities of the day impinge on my desires. Nevertheless, during the academic year, I squeeze in writing in fits and starts, steady but not prolific, and hit it hard and habitually during the off-season. ■

Allison Futterman has been published in *Charlotte* magazine and has written for *The Charlotte Observer*.

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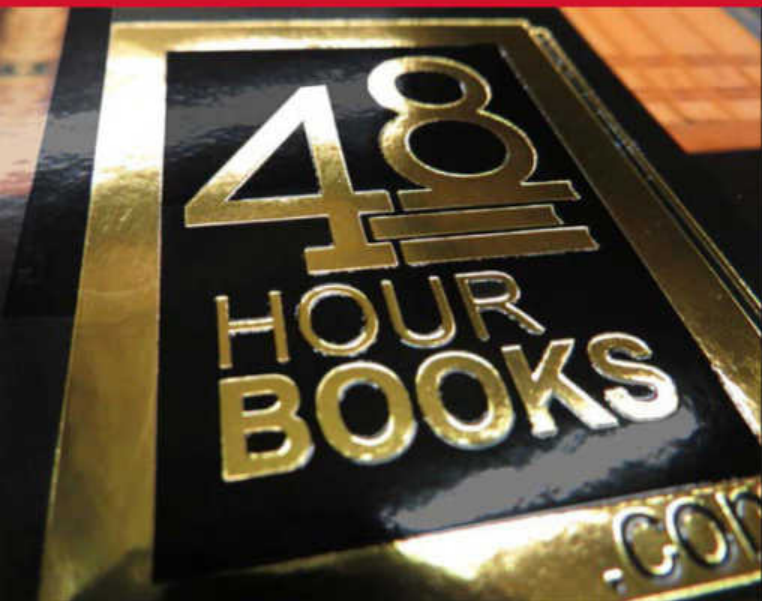
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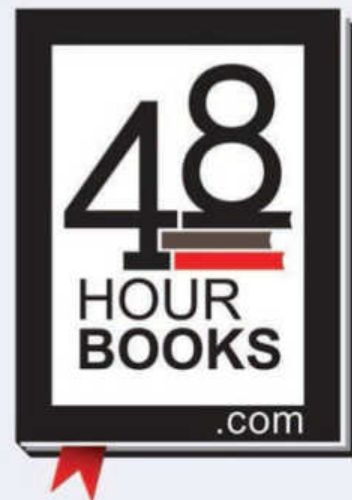
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In our feature story about Mary Jo Bang, editor Alicia Anstead asks Bang to explicate a poem. The poem is featured here.

A MAN MENTIONED IN AN ESSAY

She began with the premise that the world was an unbroken overlay of dust motes and added to that only what she could see: a bird eats corn and becomes. It's true if you see a platypus in a glass case, you remember. A layer of thinking makes ideas go forward until the latch at the end of the day where sleep gets attached to fading, the loop set on auto-alert for a future waking. She knew she was one of countless others, any of which one might meet and soon forget. There was no reason it should be otherwise. The essay mentioned a man, an interview, a train, fingerprints, photo, shoes, and a red sweater. The future was quite irresistible, it washed over you. Because, she said, is a way of pointing to the apparent reason that, in a trial in which the complaint concerns the terms of human behavior. She didn't notice the year's ending. Then shortly after midnight, she heard noises outside and realized it was the muffled repetitive boom of distant fireworks. Good-bye to that, she said.

"A Man Mentioned in an Essay," from *The Last Two Seconds*, reprinted with permission from Mary Jo Bang © 2015, Graywolf Press.



HOW I WRITE

Seized by an image

Creative writing professor and former poet laureate of North Carolina Joseph Bathanti describes his style as "narrative, more rooted in stories." Here is an example of his work.

MY FATHER AT THE MONTREAL MUSEE DES BEAUX ARTS

I stroll into an alcove
and there on a blunt onyx plinth
sits my father, cross-legged, dozing,

perfectly rendered
in prefigurement hundreds of years ago.
The modesty of the piece is typical of him,

titled simply by the curators,
or even the archaeologist
who catalogued it at the excavation site:

*Seated Old Man. Described:
Buff pottery with traces of pigment,
Late classic Vera Cruz 600-1000.*

He wears the ceremonial cap, scars
along the outsized ochre hands knotted
in his lap. Earrings trumpet

out of majestic ears. The long scimitar
of the nose, lower lip reposed.
Like coming upon his final reverie

in the kitchen on Mellon Street,
after he has eased from the bottom
rung of the boom crane

he's been fastened to for millennia.
Punched out, shirtless, the hair on his chest
wintry, the kitchen, with its whispering

white icebox, preternaturally hushed,
light scrolling over it, shot and beer
before him like decanted amber –

an appeasement to the unappeasable God
of Steel. My father: alone
in the gallery of his mythic past –

he has forded rivers
of forgetfulness – where no one
save I may trespass.

"My Father at the Montreal Musee des Beaux Arts" was first published in *The Cincinnati Review* and is forthcoming in *The 13th Sunday after Pentecost* from Louisiana State University Press. Published with permission of the author.



BLOGOSPHERE

KATY EVANS-BUSH, CREATOR OF THE BLOG BAROQUEINHACKNEY.COM ADDS MORE TO THE BLOGOSPHERE DISCUSSION HERE.

Your blog has undergone many incarnations, as you note on your site. What has that process been like? Do you feel like you have finally found your footing?

I'm not sure it's quite as much a case of "finding my footing" as it is simply allowing the blog to grow and evolve along with my writing career. The blog was conceived as a means of growing that career and it has done very well. At the time – in 2006 – there wasn't another blog out there doing what I wanted to do. The general shape of it was very clear in my mind: not a blog about writing poems, and certainly not a blog of my poems. In fact it was to be a blog about poetry in general as well as all the other kinds of things

I and other poets, presumably, are interested in. I allowed myself tons of room to experiment and see what felt best and worked best.

So the format included book reviews, film and theatre reviews, meditations about things I read in the paper, funny stories about daily life with three kids or things that happened on the way to work. I used to do "could they by any chance be related" posts, about people as different as they could be – my favourite one was based on youthful and practically identical photographs of Beatrix Potter and Gertrude Stein. One of my best posts was a true story about a squirrel falling out of a tree.

As time's gone on it's become less about the family and more about culture generally, I suppose. I never worry about it evolving. I've established a reputation, it's brought me friends, books, freelance work

and opportunities. My recent book of essays, *Forgive the Language* (published with Penned in the Margins) contains essays and reviews that were commissioned elsewhere, and more that were written just for the book – but the germ of it was the blog, and there are several pieces in there that started as blog posts. So Baroque has achieved what I wanted it to, and more.

Blogging as a phenomenon has been utterly changed by Facebook. Most of the stuff we used to do on blogs is now on Facebook. So the blog is more of an occasional thing now for the bigger, deeper, set-piece kinds of posts. Essays, urgent news or just workshop updates. It's still evolving!

Your blog was shortlisted for the 2012 George Orwell Prize for political writing. What is the relationship between po-

litical blogging and poetry/poetics blogging?

Well, the blog has always had a fluid outline. I always wrote about politics along with other cultural matters. The Orwell Prize listing came in 2012, when I'd been really writing for a couple of years about austerity, the crash and the cuts. I'd been made redundant in 2008 and then again in 2011, so by now it was personal. I did big coverage of the TUC march when they axed all the NGOs, and every organisation I'd ever worked for pretty much ceased to exist. It was the year Vaclav Havel died, and I had written a post about him – a major figure who spanned arts and politics, in a time and place where politics was central to the arts. So it all kind of flowed together... I was really grateful for that, too. It felt really meaningful to have recognition for the more "serious" prose writing.

WRITING ESSENTIALS

Make a promise

An exercise

BY HUNTER LIGUORE

To contrast story openings that work, to alert the reader what's to come, I set students up with homework in the way of Patricia Highsmith's *The Price of Salt*. Give it a try.

To get to the story promise of Highsmith's work, read the first chapter and answer the following questions, using examples from the book to support your answers:

1. What is the main character's inner conflict?
2. What is the main character's outer conflict?
3. Looking specifically at order of information, what details do you think needed to come earlier? Later? Any info that is lacking for you?
- 3.5 Are there details or threads that you think could be omitted?
4. Where does the plot/storyline meander too far for you?
5. Would you read on – why or why not?

While some of these questions lead to other class discussions on plot, character motivation and conflict, they get us talking about what is *not* needed and *distracts* the reader from the whole.

Students cite the same wanderings that could ultimately be cut to make a tighter chapter: Sister Alicia and Richard, along with the detailed depiction of the toy department.

All three threads seem to lack a deeper connection to the main promise, which is Therese's quandary about her future and whether she will turn out like Mrs. Robichek, who is a washed-up, tired clerk, who once had a glamorous career in fashion design. Sometimes the two-page toy train description is put on the block, but knowing Highsmith's characters will take a trip across country, I point out the symbolism – not without discussing ways to make the train's purpose more evident.

The chapter does make for a lively discussion, especially since it is written with Highsmith's signature macabre – like the scene when Therese goes home with Mrs. Robichek, which modern students find disturbing, though nothing sinister actually occurs.

At the end of the talk, after everyone has had a say, I tell them what the story is *really* about: a 17-year old woman who meets a rich and carefree, older woman, falls in love with her in repressed 1950s and is later stalked by the woman's husband across the country. Once they learn this, a new discussion begins, because nothing in the chapter would indicate this is where the story will lead, from the opening.

In most cases, question number five is a flat and resounding, NO! But after learning the story direction, they say, resoundingly, YES! What do you think?

